

T H E
L O U N G E R.

[N^o XLVII.]

Saturday, Dec. 24. 1785.

HERODOTUS tells us, that Amasis King of Egypt established a law, commanding, that every Egyptian should annually declare, before the Governor of the province, by what means he maintained himself; which if he omitted to do, or if, on such examination, he gave not a satisfactory account of his way of living, he should be punished with death.

Happening to meet with this passage one night lately, it suggested some ideas as to the wisdom of such an institution, and I amused myself for half an hour before I went to bed with reflecting on the effects it might have, if introduced into this island. These thoughts recurred in my sleep, and produced a Dream, of which I shall endeavour to give some account, after premising, that when I awoke in the morning, it was some time before I could with certainty determine whether my imagination had transported me to Egypt, or if the objects it had presented to my view in my sleep were the consequence of the promulgation of a similar law in our own country.

Upon the appointed day, I fancied that I accompanied the whole inhabitants of the Province to the palace of the Governor. On our arrival we were shown into a Hall of vast extent, at one end of which, on something like a Throne, sat the Governor, surrounded by clerks, whose business it was to take down the account which every person in his turn should give. Silence being proclaimed, we were directed to approach the Throne one by one, in a certain order, to give an account of our way of *living*, and to say by what means each of us maintained himself. This summons appeared the more awful, for this reason, that the law of Amasis, like many other good institutions, had been allowed to go into disuse; and, after being neglected for ages, was now revived on account of some recent enormities, which called forth the attention of Government. I fancied too, that the law was so far altered, that, instead of death in all cases, the Governor was authorised to inflict such punishment upon delinquents as their offences should seem to merit.

The first whose lot it was to answer the awful question, was a handsome young man clothed in a garment of bright scarlet embroidered with gold. He approached the Throne with an assured countenance, and with a look of self-approbation informed the Governor, that he lived by the most honourable of all professions; that his sole business was to kill and destroy his own species, to butcher men who had never injured him, whom perhaps he had never seen before, or for whom he en-

tertained the highest esteem and regard. For doing this, said he, my country gives me a daily allowance, on which I live with ease and comfort.

At this account, I observed a momentary blush to cross the face of the Governor. He dismissed the young man with a look in which I could discern marks of dissatisfaction, not with the individual before his eyes, but with those absurd and unjust measures of government which were supposed to make such institutions necessary.

The officer was succeeded by a young man still more gaily dressed. As he approached the Throne, I could perceive in his countenance marks of anxiety and apprehension, which he seemed desirous to conceal by an appearance of ease and indifference. When the usual questions were put to him, he hesitated for some time; but at length was obliged to declare, that he was the son of an honest and industrious tradesman; that, despising the occupation of his father, he left his house, and removed to *Memphis*, where, by the splendour of his appearance, he contrived to get into the society of persons of high distinction; and that he supported the expence of this mode of life, by playing with those persons for large sums of money at games, in which, by much labour and constant attention, he had attained a superior degree of excellence. The Governor having heard him to an end, sentenced the unfortunate youth to be sent back to the house of his father, to assist him in his labour. The father, who was present in the Hall, at the same time received orders to keep his son in close confinement, till he had acquired a habit of application, and a sufficient degree of skill in the business to which he was now to apply himself.

He was followed by a person not unlike him in manner and appearance, though somewhat more advanced in years. The account this person gave of himself was nearly in these words: "I was born to an independent fortune, to which I succeeded at the age of eighteen by the death of my father. From that moment my sole object was the enjoyment of my fortune, of which I thought I should never be able to see an end. I joined in every party of pleasure, and indulged in every species of expensive dissipation. At the end of seven years I found my fortune gone, and the only comfort that remained for me was, that I had spent it in a manner suitable to my rank, and in the society of the first and noblest persons in Egypt. Happily for me, those great persons conceived that it would be unbecoming to expose one who had passed so many hours in their company, to poverty and want; at the same time they justly considered, that it might degrade a person who could boast of once having been their equal and companion, to subsist on the bounty of private individuals. They therefore humbly besought our mighty Sovereign, to bestow upon me an office at once honourable and lucrative. To this request he was pleased to lend a favourable ear. The emoluments of my office are considerable; but I am obliged to give a portion of them to a creature who performs the duties of it, and upon the remainder I can still afford to live in luxury not much inferior to that of my former opulence." Upon hearing this account, the Governor enquired into the character of the deputy, and finding he was a worthy and respectable citizen, who had long done the business of a laborious and an important office, for the small pittance allowed him by the gentleman before him, he pronounced a sentence which to me appeared highly equitable. He ordered, that the deputy should in future draw the whole emoluments, paying only to the principal the same allowance which formerly the deputy had received.

The next person who approached the Throne, addressed the Governor with an unembarrassed and a steady countenance, in the following words. "By some fortunate circumstances," said he, "I was early in life introduced into the society of many persons of the first distinction. At their tables I acquired a taste for good living, which I came to consider as the first of all enjoyments; but possessing no fortune, this passion might have proved a curse instead of a blessing, had I not happily discovered a method of gratifying it, at once easy and agreeable. By my intercourse with the great, I soon discovered that it was in my power to give, in return for the dainties of their table, something which to them was more precious, while it cost me nothing. At the board of *Sethos*, I harangue in praise of learning and learned men, well knowing that, amidst all his opulence and splendour, the chief ambition of *Sethos* is to be considered as a man of letters. At the elegant repasts of *Oforoth*, I join him in declaiming against the luxury of modern times; while each of us, with equal solicitude, looks around for some new delicacy to provoke a fatiated appetite. At the house of the rich *Sufennes*, whose vanity lies in the splendour of his entertainments, and in the excellence of his table, I openly praise every dish that is served up, and tell *Sufennes*, that his wine of Persia is the finest in the world, and that his gardens produce fruits of unrivalled excellence. In this vocation or calling of mine, as it may be termed, there is one circumstance which, it must be confessed, is sometimes a little unpleasant. When at the table of one great friend I happen to deliver sentiments and opinions diametrically opposite to those I had supported the day before at another place, a pert visitor may be so rude as to remark this sudden change, or by a broad grin to show that it has not passed unobserved. But nevertheless," continued he, "I contrive to live happily, and to enjoy all the advantages of a great fortune, without the trouble and embarrassment of it."—"Live then," said the Governor, with a look of ineffable contempt, "if you can submit to live on such terms."

Upon the removal of this gentleman there appeared a tall, thin, meagre figure, which stalked up with wonderful dignity to the presence of the Governor, and thus addressed him: "I am," said he, "the representative of the noblest and most ancient family in Egypt. My forefathers were the companions of the victories of Sesostris. It is true, that owing to the princely generosity of my great ancestors, I am at present obliged to honour some wealthy inhabitants of this province, so far as to receive from them the means of subsistence. Emboldened, perhaps, by this circumstance, one of those persons lately presumed to ask my daughter in marriage, telling me, that their hearts had long been united by every tie of the most tender affection. But I drove the vile plebeian from my presence; and, had I not been prevented, would have sacrificed him to my just indignation."

At the close of this narrative the Governor hesitated for a moment, and then ordered the guards to conduct this noble personage to the hospital set apart for the reception of lunatics.

A gentleman whose train and whose appearance bespoke his consequence, now approached the Throne, with a look and manner polished at the same time and assured. "I presume," said he to the Governor, "You are not unacquainted with the name of *Zoroës*. In that council which the wisdom of our Sovereign has established for the government of his Ethiopian dominions, I hold a distinguished place; a situation which I owe to my own talents, having neither the influence of hereditary wealth, nor the pride of illustrious ancestry, to support me. "But

“ But in the College of the Priests at Memphis I was early taught qualities by which to compensate the want of those advantages; penetration to discover the weaknesses, and pliancy to conciliate the affections of men. In that seminary, likewise, I acquired a power of eloquence to lead the passions, a subtlety of argument to confound the judgement. Endowed with such accomplishments, I obtained a seat in that council, which by the superiority of my talents I have since been enabled to guide. Amidst the divisions with which that council has been agitated, amidst the factions with which our province has been torn, the art of Zoroës has drawn from those divisions and those factions, his power and his emoluments: he has wielded to his purposes the furious zeal of the multitude, and the jarring interests of their leaders; and has risen, by his command over the fluctuating opinions of mankind, to rank, to office, and to wealth.”——The Governor looked sternly at him, and his face reddened with indignation: “ I am not indeed,” said he, “ a stranger to the name of Zoroës; I have heard of such a man, who lives on the mischiefs of faction, who foment divisions, that he may increase his own consequence, and creates parties, that he may guide them in the blindness of their course; who sows public contention, that he may reap private advantage; and thrives amidst the storms that wreck the peace of his country.” He gave the signal to the guards, who hurried Zoroës to his fate. His punishment was cruel, but somewhat analogous to his character and his crimes. He was exposed in an island of the Nile, to the crocodiles that inhabit it.

After witnessing this disagreeable exercise of justice, it was with pleasure I beheld a beautiful female, dressed with equal elegance and splendour, tripping towards the Throne, and seemingly pleased with the admiration of the surrounding multitude. In a sweet accent, though with a manner rather infantine, she informed the Governor, that some months ago she had married a man of fourscore, who had nothing to recommend him but his immense wealth, of which she previously stipulated, that she should have the absolute disposal. “ You see,” said she, “ the use I make of it. These jewels are esteemed the finest in the province; and I hope soon to possess a set still more precious.” The Governor, without hearing more of her prattle, pronounced a sentence which I confess I thought somewhat severe. He ordered her to be stripped of all her costly ornaments, and to be sent home in a plain garment to the house of her husband, with instructions, that during the remainder of his days she should be constrained to live constantly with him, and permitted to see no other company whatever.

While I was commiserating the hard fate of this fair unfortunate, the crier pronounced my own name, in a deep and hollow tone of voice. This alarmed me so much, that I awaked in no small consternation, and was very well pleased to find myself quietly in my own bed in the Good Town of Edinburgh. Of all men living, a Lounger must ever be the most puzzled to give an account of his life, conversation, and mode of living; and therefore, however wise the law of Amasis may be, I fairly own that I was happy to find I was not subject to it.

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